

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 535

By Herron

A RESOLUTION urging the government of Turkey to grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate recognition, ecclesiastical succession, and the right to train clergy of all nationalities and to respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

WHEREAS, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, located in Istanbul, Turkey, is the Sacred See which presides in a spirit of brotherhood over a communion of self-governing churches of the Orthodox Christian world; and

WHEREAS, the See is led by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who is the 269th in direct succession to the Apostle Andrew and holds titular primacy as primus inter pares, meaning “first among equals,” in the community of Orthodox churches worldwide; and

WHEREAS, in 1994, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, along with leaders of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, co-sponsored the Conference on Peace and Tolerance, which brought together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious leaders for an interfaith dialogue to help end the Balkan conflict and the ethnic conflict in the Caucasus region; and

WHEREAS, in 1997, the Congress of these United States awarded Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew with the Congressional Gold Medal; and

WHEREAS, following the terrorist attacks on our nation on September 11, 2001, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew gathered a group of international religious leaders to produce the first joint statement with Muslim leaders, a statement that condemned the attacks as “antireligious”; and

WHEREAS, in October of 2005, the Ecumenical Patriarch, along with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders, co-sponsored the Conference on Peace and Tolerance II in an effort to further promote peace and stability in southeastern Europe, the Caucasus region, and Central Asia via religious leaders’ interfaith dialogue, understanding, and action; and

WHEREAS, the Orthodox Christian Church, in existence for nearly 2,000 years, numbers approximately 300 million members worldwide, with more than two million members in the United States; and

WHEREAS, since 1453, the continuing presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey has been a living testament to the religious coexistence of Christians and Muslims; and

WHEREAS, this religious coexistence in jeopardy because the Ecumenical Patriarchate is considered a minority religion by the Turkish government; and

WHEREAS, the government of Turkey has limited the candidates available for the office of Ecumenical Patriarch to only Turkish nationals; there were millions of Orthodox Christians living in Turkey at the turn of the twentieth century and, due to the continued policies by the Turkish government, there are currently fewer than 3,000 of the Ecumenical Patriarch's flock left in Turkey; and

WHEREAS, the government of Turkey closed the Theological School on the island of Halki in 1971 and has refused to allow it to reopen, thus impeding the training of Orthodox Christian clergy; and

WHEREAS, The Turkish government has confiscated nearly 94 percent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's properties and has placed a 42 percent tax, retroactive to 1999, on the Baloukli Hospital and Home for the Aged, a charity hospital run by the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and

WHEREAS, the European Union, a group of nations with a common goal of promoting peace and the well-being of its peoples, began accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005; and

WHEREAS, the European Union defined membership criteria for accession at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, obligating candidate countries to achieve certain levels of reform, including stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for and protection of minorities and human rights; and

WHEREAS, the Turkish government's current treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is inconsistent with the membership conditions and goals of the European Union; and

WHEREAS, Orthodox Christians in this State and throughout the United States stand to lose their spiritual leader as a result of the continued actions of the Turkish government; and

WHEREAS, the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, a group of laymen who each have been honored with the patriarchal title, or “offikion,” by the Ecumenical Patriarch for their outstanding service to the Orthodox Church, will send an American delegation to Turkey to meet with Turkish government officials, as well as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, regarding the Turkish government’s treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that the members of this General Assembly urge the government of Turkey to:

- (1) Uphold and safeguard religious and human rights without compromise;
- (2) Cease its discrimination of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;
- (3) Grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate international recognition, ecclesiastic succession, and the right to train clergy of all nationalities; and
- (4) Respect the property rights and human rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United States, and to the members of the Tennessee Congressional Delegation with this final clause omitted from such copy.